

**STATEMENT OF
MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE NAVY
(SURFACE WARFARE/FLEET MARINE FORCE)
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BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION,
VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND RELATED AGENCIES
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Introduction

The United States Sailor is a world wide presence. The knowledge, skills, and abilities of our traditional maritime forces are now being used in ways that demonstrate the versatility and adaptability of our Navy. From combat operations to humanitarian relief efforts, our Sailors continue to meet the high expectations the American people have of them in the defense of our great nation.

On behalf of the over 404,000 Active and Reserve men and women who make up our all-volunteer Navy, I would like to thank Congress for the support and continued efforts to help ensure we remain the best equipped and well-trained military force in the world. The support that Congress has provided to our Sailors and their families, particularly in healthcare, funding for childcare centers and the success in the privatization of military housing is greatly appreciated by our men and women.

Due to the high demand on our maritime forces and with the increasing role of non-traditional missions, it is important that these pillars of support remain strong. Our Sailors and their families take great comfort in knowing that these basic necessities have the attention of our military and civilian leadership.

During this past year, our men and women have deployed in support of missions all over the world. At sea and ashore, they have answered this call to duty as they have for the past 232 years. In my travels throughout the fleet, I continue to be inspired by the hard-work, dedication and sacrifice of our Sailors. They continue to exceed all expectations and in return they must be provided the piece of mind that comes from knowing that if something happens to them they will be taken care of and their families well supported.

In visiting wounded warriors in Military Treatment Facilities, the families that I have spoken to have expressed appreciation for the quality of care and attention that they initially receive. In speaking with the mother of one severely injured Sailor, she indicated that she was overwhelmed by the outreach and level of support that her son had received, but she asked, “Who will be here for us in six months or a year?” She wanted to know who would help them navigate through the rehabilitation process and the transition to non-military care during her son’s road to recovery.

This is a question that the Navy and the Department of Veterans Affairs take very seriously and are working together to address. We have strengthened our liaison at the Department of Veterans’ Affairs’ headquarters. This liaison allows us to facilitate the quick and efficient delivery of benefits from the Veterans Health Administration and the Veterans Benefits Administration to our separating Sailors and Marines. These liaison officers also coordinate on a daily basis the transition of Sailors and Marines from the Department of Defense to VA — ensuring a “warm hand-off” to local VA facilities

Safe Harbor and Healthcare

In August 2005 the Navy started the Safe Harbor Program. It is designed to assist severely injured Sailors and their families in dealing with non-medical and personal challenges from time of injury through reintegration back into active duty or to civilian life for up to five years. Over the past year we have continued to refine this program in identifying and tracking those Sailors who the program is designed to support.

We currently support 150 Sailors that have been severely injured in support of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. This year Safe Harbor has expanded to include all severely injured Sailors who qualify for a single injury disability rating of 30% or greater and be of special nature

such as amputation, severe burns, traumatic brain injuries, complete or major loss of sight/hearing, paralysis, and post traumatic stress disorder. We anticipate the expansion of this program will result in providing services to approximately 250 annually.

Safe Harbor has worked closely with the Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment to leverage some of the capability of this program. We continue to look for innovative ways to meet the needs of our severely injured Sailors and their families.

As we improve the process in which we provide for the needs of our severely injured, we must apply the same level of attention to those who return from deployments whose medical needs may not be immediately apparent. Mental health among our returning Sailors and the ability to identify Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury have improved over the past year, but we must also be able to provide care that results from the psychological toll that multiple deployments have on our Sailors and their families. The un-predictably that comes with surge deployments and non-traditional missions is having an effect on our Navy children. In Town Hall meetings with family members, I have heard on several occasions concerns that the need for mental health professionals and counselors must be able to meet the demand that this strain has brought upon our children. Providing for the emotional and mental health needs of our families, especially our children, is an area that we continue to improve.

In 2007, 13 Deployment Health Centers (DHC) were established as non-stigmatizing portals of care for service members and their families. The success of the DHC concept resulted in the decision to expand the DHCs to 17 in Fiscal Year 2008. Providing for these types of counselors at our Fleet Family Support Centers remains a priority in our Fleet concentration areas.

Healthcare services provided to our Sailors and their families is the flag ship benefit of all military entitlements that we must sustain for our active duty population, family members and retirees. Our military healthcare system is the cornerstone of our quality of life benefits and one that is highly valued by its beneficiaries.

Recruiting

Over the past year I have been re-energized by the American spirit that lives in each of the men and women who wear our uniform. I meet them on flight decks, engine rooms, bridges of ships, and on the ground in some of the world's most austere places. Each time I speak with our youngest Sailors, I'm left with the question I never stop asking myself. Where do we find these people? Where do we find the young men and women so dedicated to the ideals of this country that they would volunteer to defend it at all costs? This is the job of our Navy Recruiters. Despite the fact that 72% of the target population to recruit for military service is ineligible, without a waiver, due to moral, academic (low AFQT scores) medical or legal issues, during Fiscal Year 2007, 47,988 men and women became United States Sailors. Navy Recruiters achieved 101% of the active duty recruiting goal and 100% of our reserve accession. In meeting these recruiting goals, we have not had to lower the standards for enlistment. Almost 93% are high school graduates and 12% of those have some college education. We are able to meet these recruiting goals because of the variety of jobs and specialties that our Navy has to offer and because of the unique brand of service that comes to serving our nation at sea.

Recruiting methods are very deliberate in ensuring that the focus is not solely on meeting a quota, but fitting the right person for the right job. We have shifted from sizing to shaping the enlisted force poised to support a future 313 ship Navy.

Our efforts are not solely on recruiting, but retaining the best and brightest Sailors remains our objective and key to success. Reenlistment rates have consistently supported our end strength requirements. Although increased operational demands and added stress on our families create a challenging retention environment, targeted special pays have a strong impact on reenlistment. In addition, maintaining selective reenlistment bonuses has proven to be essential in sustaining retention of critical skills. The Navy retains the right people by offering rewarding opportunities for professional growth, development and leadership directly tied to mission readiness.

Sailors in Action

We are a Navy that our nation relies upon to keep the fight away from our shores and our fleet is deployed around the world meeting that responsibility. In addition to providing maritime security and supporting our forces on the ground in the Central Command area of responsibility, we continue to build partnerships with our friends and allies to defeat terrorism and threats to our common interests.

Last year our Sailors provided aid and support to citizens around the world. USS PELELIU (LHA 5) participated in providing medical assistance and relief to countries throughout the Pacific, USNS COMFORT (T-AH 20) deployed to the Caribbean and Latin America providing medical services and humanitarian relief support to 12 different countries, and in Bangladesh, our Navy and Marine Corps Team responded to massive flooding in the wake of a severe typhoon that left millions of citizens homeless and without food.

At home, Sailors provided on scene diving and salvage assistance to the Minneapolis bridge collapse, firefighting assistance during the San Diego wildfires, and rescued 55 civilians stranded during a massive winter storm in the Pacific Northwest.

Our Sailors take pride in their ability to respond and participate in these missions at home and around the world while still meeting the increasing demands on our traditional maritime requirements.

As of January 2008, the Navy has contributed over 63,000 Individual Augmentees since the beginning of ground operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa. Sailors I have met performing these duties are proud of the contributions they are making in the fight.

Currently there are over 12,000 Sailors serving as Individual Augmentees. To better support our Sailors and their families assigned to these non-traditional missions we have phased in the Global War on Terrorism Support Assignments (GSA) process. GSA allows Sailors to negotiate orders for these assignments during their normal change of station rotation. This process has improved career planning, family preparation and allows up to nine months notification prior to deployment.

GSA deployments have received considerable attention from Navy leadership, and we continue to look for ways to better prepare our Sailors and families for these types of assignments.

Reserve Force

Our Navy Reserve Force is more ready, responsive and relevant, and is a full partner in the total Navy. Alongside active duty Sailors, they provide integrated operational support to the

fleet. With critical military and civilian skill sets and capabilities, mission-ready reserve Sailors provide essential support across a full range of military operations.

Since September 11, 2001, 47,000 Navy Reservists have been mobilized in support of the Global War on Terror. On any given day, 27% of the Navy Reserve is on some type of orders contributing to the mission readiness of the Navy with both their military and civilian skill sets. This number includes about 5,050 reserve Sailors currently mobilized in support of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

A majority of our reserve families are located in the heartland of America, far away from the traditional network of support offered in fleet concentration areas. We have examined how we support these families and have made great strides in improving family readiness through an enhanced Ombudsman Program and leveraging support provided by our sister services. Our goal is for all Navy families to be provided the information they need to be well connected with support services while their loved ones are deployed.

Childcare

Navy Child Development and Youth Programs provide quality care for over 77,000 children from four weeks to 18 years of age and are available at affordable rates for our Navy families. The Navy provides childcare through 124 Child Development Centers, 103 Youth Development Programs, 3,000 Child Development Homes and 86 School Age Care Programs.

Navy families cite the lack of available and affordable childcare as one of their top family readiness issues. The average waiting time across the Navy for childcare is six months and up to 12 months in fleet concentration areas. Since Fiscal Year 2003, there has been a 19% increase in childcare requirements which has placed over 8,000 children on annual waiting lists.

Parents are waiting too long for services and missing days from work due to the lack of available childcare. Adding to this concern is the limited availability of affordable and accredited childcare services offered in the civilian community.

Through Military Construction, interim modular classrooms, Child Development Home expansion and contract civilian spaces, the Navy will increase childcare capacity by 6,907 spaces. Final construction will result in 13 additional Child Development Centers by 2013.

Continued attention in this area is critical and affects our fleet and family readiness. With these additional initiatives, we will meet our goal of providing 80% of the potential need.

Navy Family Housing and Homeport Ashore

Navy Family Housing is an important issue for our Sailors and their families. Providing Sailors the opportunity for suitable, affordable and safe housing directly impacts mission readiness. When a Sailor is deployed, they should not be burdened with the concern for their family residing in locations that are unsafe and without adequate support such as good schools, medical care and community services.

Thanks to the support of this Committee and members of Congress, we have improved the housing available to our Sailors through Public Private Venture (PPV). Sailors cite the PPV initiative as one of the best quality of life improvements in recent years.

The Navy's goal to eliminate all inadequate housing by the end of Fiscal Year 2007 was realized by having all PPV agreements in place last October. A total of 19 privatization projects have been awarded for an end state of 40,355. The Navy secured \$4.9 billion in private sector investment from \$277 million Navy funds resulting in an 18 to 1 leverage ratio. This was a huge return on our investment.

The impact that PPV has had in improving the quality of life and instilling pride in our Navy Family Housing neighborhoods is something that I have seen first hand in military communities across our Navy. Sailors are proud of their homes and have shown greater interest in their neighborhoods and local community.

The Homeport Ashore Program is an initiative that was developed to provide junior Sailors the opportunity to reside in adequate off-ship quarters who would otherwise be required to live onboard ship. Homeport Ashore is being accomplished through Military Construction, Unaccompanied Privatization and re-designation of existing facilities.

Thousands of Sailors have benefited from this initiative, however, approximately 9,000 of our junior Sailors are still living onboard ships while in homeport. Moving these Sailors off ships remains a priority and requires us to assign two or more Sailors per room. Although housing these Sailors does not meet the DoD requirement of 90 square feet per person, our Sailors are very thankful for this initiative and know that we will continue to work to meet this requirement. Our current inventory is 15,324 rooms with a deficit of 12,755. The goal is to meet the full one plus one standard by 2016.

Great strides have been made in providing suitable, affordable and safe housing for our Sailors and their families. PPV and Homeport Ashore are examples of initiatives that have had a direct impact on the retention, morale and the quality of life of our men and women. Continued emphasis in this area is imperative in keeping high quality people in our all volunteer force.

Conclusion

Navy families are strong, resilient and proud of their contributions during this critical time in our nation's history. We are asking more of our Sailors than ever before, and more of their families. Surge deployments, individual augmentation and duty in places our Navy has never been has resulted in a need for even more family support. The programs and initiatives we presently have in place to support our families must continue to evolve as the needs of our families change.

In my travels throughout the fleet, I continue to be inspired by the dedicated efforts and patriotism of our Sailors. The culture solidified by more than two centuries of service from the sea is having a significant impact wherever our Sailors serve.

They are succeeding because they have embraced a warrior ethos that is difficult to capture in words, but never the less is very much a part of who we are. The United States Sailor is being asked to learn more, train harder and take on more responsibility. They consistently answer the call to duty with honor, courage and commitment.

Our Sailors will continue to improve, develop and rise to the challenges of world events as they always have. They will do this because they are keenly aware of the trust, confidence and responsibility the American people have in them and because they believe in the rich tradition of our Naval Service.